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Muria

THE MURIA'S LIVELIHOOD

Their interest in these household occupations may be seen in scores of homely riddles, which describe them in vivid symbol.

> Drumming, drumming, what is that drum?
> At cock-crow she is drumming.

A motiari is expected to be back from the ghotul by dawn and should be busy husking grain before her parents are awake.

A broom is 'the thing that licks quickly and then falls flat'; a leaf-plate is 'the little tank full of thorns' or 'the boy that morning and evening gives a share to all'; a pot of curds hawked round the village is described as 'the white cock going from house to house'.

But the main interest of chelik and motiari—for after all they are still only boys and girls—is in food. *'Bhaio bihān handiya ma dhyān.* As soon as morning comes, his mind is in the cooking-pot.' Of things to eat the Muria have a considerable variety, much more than would be available to people of similar economic status in a town. All the rich and varied produce of the great Bastar jungles is open to them; the State has not yet interfered with their right to natural roots, fruit and leaves—they may take what they want so long as they do no damage.

FIG. 5. Usual rice husker. Length 5'9"

As Grigson says of the Maria: 'The difficulty is not so much to say what they collect and eat as what they do not; in fact, if one were to take one of the lists of trees, shrubs and herbs compiled by the Central Provinces Forest Department and copy from it the names of all edible forest products, one would not even then produce an exhaustive list.'[1] I do not propose to give such a list here; but I will briefly mention the things that chelik and motiari like best. Meat and fish probably stand first in popularity—I will describe them later.

Among fruit trees, the mahua is supreme. When the flowers begin to fall, the cattle are kept tied up until the women and children have gathered them. They spread them in bright yellow patches swiftly turning brown on rocks, before their houses, in specially-made enclosures. When dry enough, the flowers are beaten with heavy sticks, sometimes with the wooden doors of a pigsty. The pulp is made into chutney with dried khamer fruit and tamarind kernels, and eaten with rice or gruel. The oil is used for cooking and lighting. The flowers are stored in baskets, and make one of the most eagerly demanded gifts when the chelik make a dance tour of a village.

Another popular fruit is, of course, the mango. The motiari fetch baskets of wild mangoes from the forest where the trees grow in profusion, cut them up in the ghotul and give them with chilli and salt to the chelik.

Acura fruit is liked, and there are many riddles about it. 'A green pigeon came from Porrobhum and laid its eggs on a leaf.' 'The white bird hides its eggs under its wings.' Other popular fruits are those of the thorny bhoir—'Mother bites, but daughter invites'; the kurin—'The little sparrow's liver is sweet'; the sāma, the char, the jamun and the tamarind. Tendu fruit is picked while still unripe and put in kodon chaff to mature. Sometimes it is buried in the ground and a fire is lit above it. When ripe, it is eaten raw. Wild figs are eaten ripe or dried and ground up with flour.

[1] Grigson, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

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THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

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Wori wori singār,
Bāni bāni pungār.
Rows and rows of decorations,
There are many kinds of flowers.
—A honeycomb.

Tutri bukāte bāri perek.
In a small hole is a small seed.
—*Lokti* bees.

Untie the she-buffalo and milk the peg.
—Getting honey from a hive.

A herd of cattle has one leader.
—The swarm and its queen.

Many flowers grow in the tank.
—A honeycomb.

Flower, flower, how it flowers!
What comes out of the flower?
—Bees.

I have recorded one song about bees, but I was unable to discover any games that illustrated the taking of a hive.

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Song

The bees suck the kosra flower,
Search for the bees, Kotwar,
Send out the boys, Kotwar.
The bees suck the paddy flower,
Search for the bees, Kotwar,
Send out the boys, Kotwar.
The Manjhi says he'll give his daughter
To the boy who kills the bees.
An orphan chelik kills the bees,
He brings the hive and shows the Manjhi.
The Manjhi gives the boy his daughter.
The bees suck the mandia flower,
Search for the bees, Kotwar,
Send out the boys, Kotwar.

VII. Oil

Ann kare motai, tel kare chikmai, kapare kare barai. Food fattens, oil adorns, clothes dignify.—Muria saying

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The Muria make many different kinds of oil; some for use in their carts, some for light, some for medicine, but most, of course, for food. The *gdrangyi* is extracted from mahua seed and is used mainly for cooking. So is the oil gained from the usual oil-seed crops, 'the slender trees that have a hundred babies', which are often raised in the *bāri* gardens. Seeds of the sarai tree are collected and make a useful oil. The fat of lizards and the grubs that live in the date-palm and the fat of cow, buffalo, goat, pig, cock, and several kinds of deer all yield oil which can be used for cooking and to mix with food. For lighting purposes and to oil the wheels of bullock-carts, oil made from the seed of the karanji, bandgul or kusum is used. Oil for anointing the bride and bridegroom in marriage and

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